

# Pine-Popple Wild Rivers

[Program Property Page](#)

Other Plans: [1981 Master Plan](#) (not [NR44](#)-compliant); [Interim Forest Management Plan](#)

## Property Overview

The Pine-Popple Wild Rivers, located in southern Florence County, comprise two of only five state-designated Wild Rivers in Wisconsin. The entire 89-mile length of the Pine River and 62 miles of its major tributary, the Popple, were designated as Wild Rivers by the State Legislature in 1965, to be protected from development and kept in a natural, free-flowing condition. The DNR's Pine-Popple Wild Rivers project area encompasses the lower 12 miles of the Popple River and the lower 33 miles of the Pine River, ending at the confluence of the Pine with the Menominee River. DNR ownership encompasses 11,547 acres. Approximately 80% of the project area is publicly owned, either by the state or by Florence County, with the remainder made up of small, privately-owned parcels or owned by WE Energies. WE Energies, whose predecessor companies first began acquiring land along the Pine River in 1916 for development of power generating plants, owns and operates two hydroelectric facilities at the Pine River and Kingsford dams, which predate the wild river designation.

The two rivers originate in the vast forests and swamps of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, in the [North Central Forest Ecological Landscape](#), which borders the northern half of the Northeast Sands to the west. They flow through a remote, rugged, and undeveloped area. The river corridors are heavily forested with hemlock-hardwoods and lowland conifer and swamp hardwoods in the upper reaches and aspen-maple-pine forests in the lower reaches. Rock outcrops, spring ponds, lakes, and intact, forested stream corridors add to the diversity. The river waters range from quiet sections that meander slowly through lowland forest to swift, rocky riffles, low rapids, and waterfalls.

One tract that is part of the Haley Creek Swamp State Natural Area is located within the boundary of the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers property. This tract is located in the westernmost portion of the property south of the Pine River, and encompasses two small spring ponds known as Dorothy Lake and Mud Lake, just south of Savage Lake.

## Public Use and Recreation Facilities

The Pine-Popple are among Wisconsin's most remote river systems, and offer a truly wild experience in a secluded, natural setting. The rivers, lakes, and streams offer high-quality paddling and fishing. Canoeing, kayaking, tubing, fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, and scenic enjoyment are popular activities. The property's remoteness means that access is limited and can be challenging. The DNR maintains a series of carry-in boat access sites and parking areas throughout the property, as well as a small number of primitive campsites, but many access sites are unimproved and do not provide off-road parking. Many gravel roads are only marginally improved or unimproved and poorly marked, and require high-clearance/four-wheel-drive vehicles. Additional recreational facilities, including campgrounds, improved boat access sites, and hiking trails are available on adjacent Florence County lands or on WE Energies land as part of their [Wilderness Shores Recreation Area](#). Also adjacent to portions of the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers is the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest, privately owned land under a conservation easement that provides public access for certain recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, and hiking. Certain trails and roads across both public and private land are open to vehicle access, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles as posted.



## Natural Resources Management

Section 30.26, Wisconsin Statutes, states that designated Wild Rivers “shall receive special management to assure their preservation, protection and enhancement of their natural beauty, and their unique recreational and other inherent values”. NR 302.02(4), Wisconsin Administrative Code, states that Wild Rivers have an established protection zone comprising “the area of land within 400 feet of the waters or to the visual horizon from the water whichever is greater on either side of the wild river”. No development, including campgrounds, is allowed on DNR-managed lands adjacent to shorelines in the protection zone, nor beyond the protection zone up to at least a ¼-mile from either side of the wild river other than that which is necessary to accommodate the users of the wild river areas. Additionally, no vegetation control (save for erosion control or restoration activities) is allowed within 150 feet from the bank on either side of the wild river.

Accordingly, management on the state-owned land along the rivers is designed to show as few traces of human intervention as possible, and developments are kept back from the river’s edge except for limited carry-in boat launches. Except for designated road crossings, motorized vehicle access is limited to designated areas outside the protection zone. Lands more than 150 feet from the rivers are managed for sustainable forest production, wildlife habitat, and public recreation. Timber harvests are completed with minimal visual impact, and selective cutting encourages long-term maintenance of or conversion to longer-lived species. The lands owned by Florence County and WE Energies are managed under a similar philosophy through local zoning regulations and agreements, respectively.

### Special Attributes

One “Primary Site” has been identified by the department for special consideration in this planning process. Primary sites generally encompass the best examples of 1) rare and representative natural communities and 2) documented rare species populations with opportunities for restoration or connections. Such sites warrant high protection and/or restoration consideration during the development of a property master plan. Primary Sites can be considered High Conservation Value Forests for Forest Certification. The Primary Site on the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers is:

- Goodman Wild Lakes and Pine River (5,972 acres)

There are no State Natural Areas within the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers other than the small tract that is part of Haley Creek Swamp SNA (see Property Overview, above). A new State Natural Area designation may be made during this planning process.

The western portion of the Pine Wild River is included in the [Lauterman Lake Important Bird Area](#), a site identified by the [Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative](#) as containing critical habitat for birds. The Pine-Popple rivers have been identified as an aquatic [Conservation Opportunity Area](#) (COA) in the [Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan](#) and a portion of the Wild Rivers property is also encompassed in the Nicolet Hemlock-Hardwoods COA. The Savage-Robago lakes area within the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers has been identified as a [Wetland Gem](#) by the [Wisconsin Wetlands Association](#).

The Pine and Popple rivers have been designated as [Outstanding Resource Waters \(ORW\)](#). These, along with Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW) are surface waters which provide outstanding recreational opportunities, support valuable fisheries and wildlife habitat, have good water quality, and are not significantly impacted by human activities. ORWs receive the state’s highest protection standards.

